

Conclusion

As this report has demonstrated, many of the reductions in state spending enacted since fiscal year 2001 have had a particularly harsh impact upon women and girls, either because they represent a disproportionate share of the beneficiaries of particular social programs or because they depend more heavily upon such programs than their male counterparts. In fact, women represent more than six out of every ten students in Massachusetts' public colleges, nearly two out of every three adult MassHealth beneficiaries, nearly eight out of every ten participants in the Commonwealth's Elder Home Care program, and nine out of every ten TAFDC recipients. None of these areas has been spared as the Commonwealth has struggled to close billions of dollars worth of budget deficits over the past several years.

The cuts described in this report are causing real pain today, but they may lead to even greater damage in the years ahead. When preventive health care programs and investments in education and training are cut it often takes years for the damage to appear. For example, the reductions in benefits and changes in eligibility for publicly-funded health insurance can lead to greater health care costs as individuals seek routine care through emergency rooms. Deep cuts to prevention and treatment programs in public health will endanger the health of thousands of residents of the Commonwealth over the long run. Cuts in funding for employment and training programs, for child care subsidies, and for student financial assistance will diminish the Commonwealth's productive capacity and darken its economic future.

As the Commonwealth's fiscal and economic situation begins to stabilize, it is time to begin to ask whether the negative impacts of budget cuts on women and girls is something that should simply be accepted as inevitable, or whether new policies should be adopted in the years ahead to reverse the cuts that have caused real harm to women and girls across the Commonwealth.

